

One of the main topics for discussion during the Unity Meeting in July was that of fellowship. What is the meaning of fellowship? Who is in the fellowship? Can we withdraw fellowship from a person? These were some of the questions discussed. Bro. Carl Ketcherside (hereafter Bro. K.) said, "Fellowship on the divine side is a union with God through Christ and a participation in his life through the indwelling Spirit; and on the human side it is a partnership of brethren whose human relations were transformed by the gift of the Spirit bestowed upon them." Again, "Everyone, therefore, who has been baptized by virtue of that one Spirit and brought into a relationship which is known as the one body in which all of us are partakers of the one Spirit is in the fellowship the New Testament talks about, because it is the fellowship of the Spirit." He said, "Fellowship is a relationship sustained to and with persons, not to things, or to ideas."

His definition of fellowship is acceptable so far as it goes, but, since it deals only with the noun form of the word, it does not go far enough. Bro. K. seems to have no use for the verb form of fellowship (*koinoneo*). He said the Holy Spirit "never used fellowship in the sense of fellowshiping some one. . . . Fellowship is a state or condition into which we are called by God." But in spite of this statement he says "Christ does not fellowship us because of what we are, but because of what he is." Since he defines fellowship as a relationship sustained with persons, it is certainly correct to speak of our fellowshiping those persons with whom we sustain that relationship.

His statement that fellowship is a relationship we cannot sustain with things, or ideas, is obviously wrong. First, both Thayer and Bagster, give as one definition, "to have fellowship with a thing; to mix one's self up in a thing," and give Eph. 5:11; Phil. 4:14; Rev. 18:4 as examples. And we may add that the noun form is used of our relationship to things in Rom. 11:17; 1 Cor. 9:28; Rev. 1:9. The verb form is also used in the sense of partaking in sins of others in 1 Tim. 5:22; 2 John 11; Rev. 18:4. So we can sustain a relationship with things which the Holy Spirit expresses by the use of the word "fellowship." It may be of interest to the reader to know just where this verb form (*koinoneo* and *sunkoinoneo*) is found in the New Testament. They occur in Rom. 12:13; 15:27; Gal. 6:6; Eph. 5:11; Phil. 4:14, 15; 1 Tim. 5:22; Heb. 2:14; 1 Pet. 4:13; 2 John 11; Rev. 18:4. The word occurs in four noun forms a total of thirty-five times. It is translated by such words as fellowship, communion, partaker, distribution, communication, partner, and companion.

Another thing Bro. K. affirms very positively is, "You can't put one out of the fellowship, for you did not put them in it. . . . The New Testament never tells us to put anybody out of the fellowship. . . . The term 'withdraw fellowship' is not in the Bible." This last expression is a play on words, and it is difficult to see why he makes the statement, since he goes on to say, "This does not mean there is no ground on which we must cease to recognize as being within the community those who violate the principles of Jesus." He then names three grounds for ceasing to recognize people as being in the community (1) moral turpitude; (2) teaching doctrines which deny the deity of Jesus and sever us from God; (3) being a heretic, manifesting a factious spirit. How we can cease to recognize one as being in the community, but cannot put one out of the fellowship is difficult to understand, unless he considers the church community something different from the fellowship into which we are called. The fellowship is the family of God into which we are called, and the church is the family of God (1 Tim. 3:15), so if we can exclude one from the church membership, we can put one out of the fellowship.

Is it true that we cannot put one out of the fellowship for the simple reason that we did not put him into it? I think not. Jesus said if thy brother sin against thee, go to him and you may win him. But if he hear thee not, take others with you. If he will not hear them, tell it to the church. If he will not hear the church,

let him be as a Gentile and a publican (Matt. 18:15ff). Is he out of the fellowship? If he is related to the fellowship as the Gentile and the publican are related to it, he is out of it. Then Jesus continues by saying, "What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Scriptural and righteous decisions reached and enforced by the church on earth are also enforced in heaven. When the church in Corinth, moved and directed by Paul's apostolic authority, "put away the wicked man from among" themselves (1 Cor. 5:4, 13), their action was recognized and enforced in heaven, and that man was excluded from the fellowship of the saints on earth and in heaven until he repented.

Someone asked, What can be made terms of fellowship among Christians. Bro. K. answered by quoting T. Campbell when he said, "Nothing ought to be inculcated upon Christians as articles of faith, nor required of them as terms of communion, but what is expressly taught and enjoined upon them in the word of God . . . either in express terms or by approved precedent. . . . Deductions and inferences from scriptural premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet are they not formerly binding upon the consciences of Christians further than they can perceive the connection and evidently see that they are so, for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power and veracity of God. Therefore, no such deductions can be made terms of communion. . . ." From this he concludes that classes, women teachers, instruments of music in worship, etc., cannot be made terms of fellowship. In fact, since he includes every immersed believer in the fellowship, he would have to say that Baptist doctrine and practice, as well as that of Mormons, cannot be made terms of fellowship. In California, Bro. K. was asked, Is a Mormon of eight years of age baptized into Christ? He answered, Yes, and we have to accept him as being in the fellowship. On this point he says, "We have to determine the validity of a man's baptism exactly like we determine his faith in the Lord Jesus— by asking him; we have to take his word for it." With Bro. K. and others associated with him, it matters not how much human tradition is mixed up with one's response, if he believes and is immersed, he comes into Christ and must be accepted by us as being in the fellowship. One may be baptized for the wrong purpose, but so long as he is sincere, it is acceptable to God.

If this position be true, I am at a loss to understand why Paul rebaptized the twelve men at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7). Did Paul baptize them into Christ? into the fellowship? If so, they were not in that relationship before Paul reached them, yet they believed in Jesus as the Son of God and had been immersed. Evidently Paul did not view this matter of being in the fellowship just like Bro. K. views it. The command to be baptized includes the purpose of the act and I think one cannot render intelligent obedience to the commandment without understanding to some degree the purpose of that obedience. This does not mean that he understands the matter so fully that he can never learn any more about the purpose of baptism, but it does mean that he understands that his obedience in this act is a condition of being a child of God saved from sin. If this is not true, why did Peter make the purpose a part of his answer to the question as to what people must do to be saved?

Bro. K. is emphasizing the truth that a lot of human opinions held by brethren should not be made terms of fellowship. Those who hold them should not force people to accept them in order to enjoy fellowship; those who do not hold them should not deny fellowship to those who hold them. In this department he is doing a lot of good.